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ABSTRACT

The high school has paradoxically undergone a loss in status while gaining in importance for young people. Education has become essential to survival in today's world. Along with the government's financial neglect of public high schools in favor of the development of post secondary institutions, the high school's educational task has become more difficult due to rapid social change affecting particularly adolescents. School discipline problems, such as vandalism, truancy, and violence, have been on the increase nationwide. Studies indicate that students who are not doing well academically are the ones having discipline problems and also problems coping with social pressures and responsibilities. Federal funding should be available at the individual school level for educational programs which will provide students with opportunities to develop both academically and socially. (Author/GC)

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DISCIPLINE AND THE HIGH SCHOOL

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Discipline and the High School

The high school has paradoxically undergone a loss in status while gaining in importance. Many of the jobs in government, business, and industry require some measure of post-secondary education. This has tended to devalue the high school diploma. Yet education has become essential to survival in today's world. The courts have equated education to a property right in declaring that no one can be deprived of education without due process of law. Thus the public schools have grown in importance in determining the life chances of the youth today, while at the same time experiencing neglect in favor of the development of post-secondary educational institutions such as the community college and the vocational technical community college.

Along with the neglect, which causes the State, communities, students, and even teachers to underestimate its importance, the educational task of the high school has become more difficult due to the rapid social change that this country has been experiencing and will continue to experience in the near future. Social customs and mores are changing, but not in a uniform manner, which leaves a situation bordering on social anarchy. The so called sexual revolution with its impact on the courtship patterns and marriage, the secularization of society with its impact on religious values and beliefs, the increase in social sanction for the use of alcohol and drugs of all kinds, are but a few examples of how the social revolution has affected everyone.

The Function of the High School

The task of the high school has been to provide a stable framework within which the youth of this country can go about the difficult task of growing-up. Through the

high school the youth are inculcated with the values of society and are prepared to become responsible adults and good citizens. This growth process for the youth has become more difficult for them to attain as the pressures on them to make many of the choices that are part of the growth process have increased; and they have been pressured to make many decisions before they have had the intellectual maturity to make those decisions. Decisions about sex, drugs, careers, race relations, and social philosophy are being pushed upon youth by an adult society that is in a quandary over the same issues.

Youth is a time of idealism and a search for certainty. It is also a time when adults are revered and imputed with competence. Thus it is also a time of disillusion and an erosion of respect for authority. Since idealism and a search for certainty are the natural attributes of youth, it is not surprising, in these times of rapid social change, that the youth of this country have been characterized as disillusioned and as lacking the proper respect for authority.

The bridge between society and the young is the high school, and within the high school the all important person is the teacher. Thus high schools that meet the needs of students along with dedicated professional teachers are needed more today than at any other time.

Discipline and the High School

Discipline problems have become one of the main conerns of the schools nationally. Vandalism, truance, violence, disrespect, and other acts by students have been on the increase. Senator Birch Bayh's opening statement at the Hearings on School Violence and Vandalism to the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency recited a litany of statistics to underscore the beleaguered situation in the high school. Among the statistics that he cited, he noted that there were an estimated 70,000 physical assaults on teachers annually in the United States, and that by the end of 1973 the average cost per school district for vandalism

was over $60,000. The nature of the problem varies from region to region, state to state, and school district to school district.

Contrary to the national trends, Nebraska for example has not been experiencing discipline problems. I conducted a study of discipline problems in the Nebraska schools in the Fall of 1977, (which appeared in the December issue of Catalyst), which found that discipline problems have tended to remain the same and in some cases tended to decline over the past 5 years. This is not to say that Nebraska does not have discipline problems, but when one considers the educational programs of Nebraska as a whole, discipline problems are few. These findings are in contrast to the results of a study on discipline problems that I conducted in Michigan (1977).

In Michigan I found that the underachieving students were the ones that were experiencing discipline problems. I conducted a study on suspension using data from a school district in Michigan from the 1972-73 school year. This was before the court rulings requiring due process were handed down in 1974. At that time, suspension was one of the most commonly used disciplinary procedures. Studying this school district, I found that the students who were being suspended tended to be in a group that had significantly lower Metropolitan Achievement Test scores. What these results indicated was that the student who was not doing well in school was the student that was experiencing discipline problems. It also indicated that these students were the ones who were having the most severe problems coping with the pressures and responsibilities that are being placed upon today's adolescent.

The Need for Education Policy Reform

The problems faced by the high school are not uniform, they vary from state to state and from school district to school district. Nebraska's problems are different from Michigan's and the problems of smaller districts within Nebraska

are different from the problems of larger districts, but the problems of growing up for adolescents in today's world, and the attendant pressures, remain the same for all students regardless of the state or school district in which they may reside.

Thus programs need to be developed at the school district level in order to improve the educational delivery system of the high school. Each school district needs to have the latitude to develop programs that will enable student to successfully resolve their problems.

Funding for alternative education programs, which will allow the school system to offer a variety of educational programs, is needed. The federal government needs to develop a block grant program which enables the individual school systems across the country to tailor alternative delivery systems in accordance to their needs. The piecemeal funding process which gives grants for Career Education, Cooperative Education, Compensatory Education, Vocational Education, etc. needs to be refashioned to allow the school systems the necessary latitude to meet the needs of its students.

School systems should be allowed to develop programs with the only criterion being that they can show a relationship between the program and the needs of students. The federal government should act as a coordinator and not the administrator of the programs. So long as a school district can demonstrate that it is meeting its goals, and that the programs that are implemented meet federal guidelines concerning equal educational opportunity, they should be allowed the freedom to administer the educational delivery system regardless of the funding source.

These changes are needed in order to prevent the possible dissolution of the high school as a viable educational program available to all students. The potential for an educational crisis in the high school is great and growing, and the danger is that the present educational delivery system for secondary education will be abandoned out of frustration in favor of a less viable system.

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